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THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

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Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

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July, 1891.

QUESTION CXXV.

If we occupy just the positions we are fitted for by previous actions (Karma), how is it that so few of us fill their positions properly? Why are the majority of lives failures?

Ans.—Whether or not any particular life is a failure depends upon the degree in which it has executed the task specific for that incarnation. But what that task is, even what its degree, we cannot know. Of course, if the task was some external, tangible acquirement—wealth, for instance, or celebrity, the question of its achievement could be easily settled. But in a spiritual evolution externals give no clue. The real development is within. Now the stage to which we arrived at our last exodus from earth-life, the reasons why we are in our actual circumstances rather than in some very different, the particular quality which it was the purpose of this incarnation to expand,—these are questions screened from sight. As one does not know what one may call one's "mission", it is hardly possible to say that one's life is a failure, much less that the majority of lives are.

All Theosophic teaching insists that situation is not an acci-

dent or a freak, but the direct result of antecedent causes; in other words, that we frame our own destiny by our conduct and mould ourselves our successive incarnations. But in that conduct, and consequently in that result, there are a good many elements. It is not simply a question of whether we have been honest, virtuous, and charitable, but how far we have corrected faults of temper, judgment, etc., how far we have trained ourselves in industry, fairness, breadth of view, reasoning power, what advance we have made in moral sensitiveness, in percipience of reality through form, in affinity for spiritual conceptions and high ideals. A meritorious treatment of other people in time previous might of itself dictate a present situation of deserved prosperity, but this would not be the best reward if it precluded conditions favoring the further correction of fault or acquirement of culture. Hence a *truly* Karmic situation would be one providing some reasonable recognition of previous merit, but also such circumstances as should foster the interior growth. Thus a very good man might have moderately comfortable environment, but combined with it domestic ties or local influences or personal experiences precisely fitted to bring out qualities in which he was still deficient or stimulate others needing stimulation. But any man, good or bad, since he has a checkered Karmic record, and has also a character unequally developed in different sections, must have a Karmic award composed of a variety of elements, and these not inferable by a spectator merely of his exterior life. Only an Adept could tell why he was so placed, and why there was pressure in some quarters and ease in others, and what was the main lesson to be enforced during his present life.

Now this complication makes quite uncertain a judgment as to whether men fill their positions properly. How can we tell? It may be possible to say whether they are reputable in business, good to their families, charitable, and so forth. But their "positions" involve many more things, subtle, unseen, intricate relations and functions, brought about by Karma but of the fulfilment of which we know nothing.

That any man wholly fulfils each duty in each department is of course unassertable. But that a fair proportion fairly per-

form them, allowing for human weakness, seems probable. Otherwise there would be general retrogression instead of progress. If most men were indolent, or indifferent to their families, or cruel, or bad, evolution would go on the wrong way. That it goes on the right way shows a preponderance of good. And this must, for like reason, hold true of the inner evolution which we cannot touch or guage. The race is advancing, worthier ideals uplifting, higher faculties unfolding. There are a good many facts to discourage, and some to disgust, but on the whole things are hopeful. If an enormously large majority of men are poor or obscure or without attainment of their purposes, it still does not follow that they are failures, or that they have not acquired some capital in character which is worth all their struggle and suffering and disappointment. We see the former facts, but we can't see the latter.

QUESTION CXXVI.

Mr. Sinnett says that "Devachan is a state, not a locality." I cannot understand how I am after death to be in a state and this state to have no locality. If I am sleeping, the sleep is still not without a locality. The centre of my life, or my soul, cannot be somewhere without a place.

Ans.—The confusion is not in Mr. Sinnett's statement: it is —well, elsewhere. It is quite true that you, your soul, must be somewhere and therefore have a locality, but sleep is not you, nor does a state need a locality. A finite being must be in some place, but the state he is in need have no reference to place.

You will understand this the better if you substitute "condition" for "state" and "place" for "locality". Then the assertion is, "Devachan is a condition, not a place". Surely this is plain enough.

A Devachanee is, roughly, a disembodied being who has been isolated from objective relations and is undergoing a purely subjective experience. As this experience has nothing to do with anything outside, it can as well go on in one spot as another. It would be the same at the North Pole or in Africa or

on the moon or in space. It is a condition of the mind, not a territory or a region. Call it "Happiness". Now Happiness is not Paris or America or the Sun; it is the interior condition of the man. True, the man enjoying the happiness must be somewhere, since he can't be everywhere, but Mr. Sinnett does not deny that. Say that "Happiness is a state, not a locality", and then put "Devachan" for "Happiness", and the whole thing will be clear.

QUESTION CXXVII.

Does the monad or Ego, when re-absorbed into the Divine essence, lose its remembrance and individual identity, thus becoming practically annihilated?

Ans.—Occasional phrases, notably Edwin Arnold's beautiful line, "The dew-drop slips into the shining sea," imply such an idea. But there is no obligation to accept it, whether expressed in prose or poetry, if sound reason points to its contrary.

Extremes always excite counter extremes because of a natural revolt. Long centuries of social development, especially in regions of mental activity and feverish enterprise, have stimulated individualism to the farthest reach. Modern civilization has thus made each ego a centre for itself, and has fostered the conviction that its interests, being antagonized by all others, can only be secured by overmastering them. But, very naturally and very properly, the principle of universal selfishness in unrestrained operation arouses protest from political economy, from the laws of life, and from the moral sense; and, just as naturally though not properly, the protest expresses itself in exaggerations, even in extremes. In the political world we see well-meaning but ill-considered theories as to State management of all commercial and industrial affairs,—a reaction from excessive individualism. In the philosophic world we see theories drawn from the doctrine of Univeral Law and aiming to obliterate free-will and independent act,—a reaction of like kind. In the religious world we see theories based on the One-ness of the Universe and forecasting an era when the present heterogeneity shall be reversed into an utter homogeneity.

One case of the last is the idea that men, when re-absorbed into the Divine Pleroma from which they emanated, lose their individuality. Clearly perceiving that the miseries of life have mainly come from the assertion of self, and looking eagerly for a remedy and a time which shall end them, some pious thinkers have sprung to the conclusion that the corrective to self-assertion is the obliteration of self. If there is no more self there can be no more selfishness, and if no more selfishness, no more misery. But the cure for disease is not the extinction of the patient, and calmer pathologists demur to so drastic a treatment.

There is unquestionably a difficulty in reconciling absorption with continued individuality, though not a greater one than is met in every other field of large thought. The most that can be done is to allow weight to considerations from reason and analogy. If individuality is finally obliterated, there would seem no sufficient reason for it ever to have begun. The long round of painful evolution, perfected through toil and through the highest moral quality, could have no justification if it ended in cancellation. Besides, it is not the Divine in man which needs to be immortalized,—that is eternal anyhow: it is the Higher Ego (Manas) which is to become immortal through its deliberate union with Buddhi. But the individual Manas immortalized by that union is thus secured from future extinction.

We can form some dim conception of an individuality absorbed yet continuing, if we handle two thoughts—consciousness and membership in a Society. The consciousness of a child is very limited. Its horizon is narrow, its interests and perceptions few. With age and experience come new and larger thoughts; but also the capability of apprehension so expands that all sorts of sentiments, impulses, and situations can be understood, even felt, though without having undergone the conditions producing them. In other words, the area of apprehension vastly exceeds the area of relation; or, yet again, the mature Ego can enter into the consciousness of a number of other Egos. Now imagine this process indefinitely extended, and we have an idea of how an individual can remain an individual, and yet the limits to his consciousness be practically removed. He is absorbed in the whole, but ever himself.

Membership in a Society exemplifies it. If all members are alike in their purpose of unity, personal preferences of policy never seeking dominance, each can enter heartily into the views and difficulties of the others, comprehending and feeling them, yet without any impulse to enforce his own. In other words, the consciousness of union is stronger than the consciousness of individuality, though not annulling it. There is mergence without fusion, unity in diversity. Indeed, the same general fact is shown in the constitution of the human body, each atom having distinct existence, yet all united in an organic whole.

A transfer of these principles to the region of the Infinite must of course be inadequate; but, as has often been shown, we can form no other conception of the Supreme than by analogies drawn from the only region we know. It may be imperfect without being actually misleading. And it is a great gain to peace and hope if the unseen can be shown an extension of the seen, if what is asserted of the future can be illustrated in what is evident in the present. Theosophy finds its greatest obstacle in its supposed *strangeness:* demonstrate that anything different would be strange, and you transform hostility to welcome.

QUESTION CXXVIII.

Is Cremation generally advocated and practised by Theosophists? Is it believed that cremation tends to a more speedy separation of the higher vehicles from the lower ones?

Ans.—Cremation is gaining favor among intelligent people because of its sanitary and other benefits, and in so far as Theosophists belong to that class they are influenced by the same considerations as influence the rest. Being naturally more free from prejudices and conventional habits, they may be supposed to incline to all improvements, and hence to this.

But it must not at all be supposed that any Theosophist could believe any particular mode of disposing of the dead to in any way affect the after condition of the soul. Whether a body decomposes slowly in the ground or rapidly in the flames matters not in the least to the higher vehicles. The sever-

ance of the personal from the individual goes on under laws which are far removed from the reach of material forces or human interference. When we leave this earth our connection with it has ceased, and it is happily not given to mortals left behind to say how fast or how uninterruptedly the next stage of our pilgrimage shall go on. They can neither contribute to nor impair the process which we have determined by our own character, least of all by anything they may do to our discarded and decaying carcasses.

QUESTION CXXIX.

What is the "unredeemable sin" mentioned in Path for June, 1890, "Notes of Devachan", page 80?

Ans.—This is misquoted. The words were "the mire of unredeemable sin". It is not any one offense, however gross, which severs the connection between the Divine and the human, but the habitual state of preferred evil, reached through long and persistent self-will, every check and lesson being powerless to induce reform, and conscience having expired. It is just as possible to kill good out of character as to kill out evil. As in the latter case low desires are steadily extinguished and every taste inconsonant with the higher life weakened till it dies of inanition, the nature continually refining till no impurity to tempt or swerve is left, so in the former every impulse to right has been resisted, conscience never heard, reform never attempted, each wish effected without respect to duty or law, the whole influence of the Higher Self defied. Evil is deliberately preferred; good is distasteful and repellent; sin is congenial and satisfactory. In the Biblical expression, such men "*choose* darkness rather than light." Through protracted indulgence they have paralyzed higher impulses, do not want them, desire their opposites. Now certainly it would be most unfair that any human being should be *forced* to be what he does not wish to be, and yet nothing short of force can turn a man from a path he is accustomed to, adapted to, delights in, wishes to continue. As he will not consent to any change for the better, and as no such change can be involuntarily imposed upon him, there is no

alternative to his continuance in evil. That point having been reached and there being no good Karma to create for him a Devachan, he can have no Devachan, as the *Path* article stated.

Very obviously an abandonment in character so extreme cannot be of common occurrence, for most human beings have *some* element of good, *some* redeeming quality, which keeps open a channel of possible rescue. It may very well be that none of us have ever encountered a person of whom it may with certainty be said that he is in "the mire of unredeemable sin". Yet even that is not sure, and still less is it sure that none such exist in our day. It is even possible, as has been authoritatively hinted at, that they may be found elsewhere than in the avowedly criminal classes, little as we might be disposed to so imagine.

QUESTION CXXX.

1. *Madame Blavatsky says that a Materialist, because of his disbelief in a future state of existence, may suffer temporary annihilation or its equivalent—total unconsciousness during his Devachanic term. If honest in his disbelief, why should he be punished for an honest mistake?*
2. *If a Materialist, presumably an intelligent person, is thus punished, how is it with the utterly ignorant who never heard of Devachan or Materialism?*
3. *Is it just to punish one for his belief or disbelief, an involuntary action of mind prompted by only such lights as he has?*

Ans.—These difficulties come from considering Karma solely as a punitive force in morals. But it is not only punitive, nor does it work only in the moral sphere. Rather is it the *universal law of cause and effect*, operating on all planes—physical, mental, psychic, moral, etc. Its operation on one plane is not restrained by considerations belonging to another plane. A falling wall will crush a bystander, whether he is a scoundrel or a saint. Mental sloth will prevent mental advance, irrespective of the beauty, strength, or rank of the slothful. If a man does not believe or does not know that he has a spiritual nature, he will not cultivate it; and if it is not cultivated, how can the effects of culture be imaprted to it unless through miracle? Should a

Materialist take one further step in Materialism and deny the existence of mind, he would not train his own: we should not exactly say that resulting ignorance was a "judgment upon him", but it would undoubtedly be the effect, the direct effect, of the inaction consequent on his disbelief. And the effect would be the same, whether the disbelief was honest or not.

Madame Blavatsky's contention appears to be that the law of cause and effect holds as strictly in the spiritual as in the physical and the mental spheres. A man denies that he has a body: he starves it and it will die. A man denies that he has a mind: he gives it no food and it withers away. A man denies that he has a soul: he refuses it sustenance and it becomes extinct. Honesty of conviction will not save from decay an unfed body or an unfed mind; why should it an unfed soul? Similarly as to ignorance. Honesty or ignorance is a consideration affecting the *moral quality* of an act and therefore the amount of its *penal* consequences, but is outside the line of mere effect following upon cause. The latter is no more a matter of morals than is the injury to a head from a falling stone. Hence the word "punishment" is inapplicable.

The quite distinct question as whether belief or disbelief is ever a proper subject of punishment is not wholly free from difficulty. Two things are certain. 1st, Belief is normally the verdict of judgment upon arguments, not at all an affair of the will. The judgment can pass only on such arguments as are before it, not upon those of which it is ignorant. 2d, No human tribunal has any right to discipline for opinion. "The criminality of error" as matter of penal legislation is a doctrine happily exploded. Fully maintaining these positions, it is yet possible to go behind them in further examination. As to the first it may be said that, while belief is a mechanical (so to say) result of judgment, the judgment itself may be biassed, or partial, or careless, or without attempt for full fact. In so far as a moral element enters in, there is responsibility. Even if there is nothing worse than stupidity, that must be the consequence of prior neglect—prior in other lives. As to the second it may be said that the very incompetence of a human tribunal, an incompetence because of want of knowledge and preroga-

tive, implies the existence elsewhere of a competent one. The Higher Powers are fitted to deal with such cases; and where misbelief or unbelief is traceable to a moral cause, such will receive its appropriate award. For we have to note that belief is not a finality, but determines action, and that action has wide-spreading effects on other men. Hence, while it is true that error is not of itself criminal, and also true that men have no right to discipline it as such, it is also true that a Higher Tribunal has sometimes need to act, and will. There is much more in the topic than this, but this is all that can now be said.

QUESTION CXXXI.

Is it to be understood from the reply to Question 79, Forum No. 16, that violence should be returned for violence? If a man strikes you, are you to strike back? This seems to me against what I have understood as Theosophic teaching.

Ans.—If this refers to the paragraph on Page 11, the reply is that the paragraph treats of criminal jurisprudence, not of personal relations; if to the paragraph on Page 9, the reply is that the statement was merely of facts, not of their propriety.

In direct answer to the Question, however, it may be said, as it has been said elsewhere, that Theosophy no more enjoins submission to violence than does any other system. By becoming Theosophists men do not vacate their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, nor to the quiet enjoyment of their property or their civic privileges. They do not forswear the protection of Courts and policemen, nor do they concede their persons and effects as unresisting prey to every ruffian who happens to fancy them. They retain the same right to self-protection as before. If a female Theosophist is subjected to an attempt at rape, is she to meekly acquiesce or to seize the nearest weapon? If a male Theosophist is attacked by a highwayman, is he to submit to spoliation or to repel it? Common-sense answers these queries. If Theosophy was a proclamation of immunity to the criminal classes, it would be an unbearable nuisance.

Whether you are to strike back if struck, depends. If you

have deserved the blow, certainly not. If it was struck to disable and rob you, strike back instantly, repeatedly, and overpoweringly. If from mere anger, no one rule can be laid down. A handy policeman is often better than a responsive fist. There are considerations, too, as to the size of your opponent, etc. But in any event two things will always be true;—1st, if you are a genuine Theosophist you will never be aggressive, quarrelsome, or likely to incur blows; 2d, if you are a common-sense Theosophist you will know for what course of treatment any particular assault calls.

QUESTION CXXXII.

If it is wrong to cure disease by mesmerism or magnetism,—at least, if thereby the patient is controlled to any extent, how did Col. Olcott heal so many in India by such means?

W. Q. J.—There seems to be no necessary connection between the premise on this question and the query put. Even if it were "wrong to cure disease by mesmerism or magnetism," it would not therefore follow that one could not heal people thereby. But I have never heard from any source of weight that it is wrong to so cure people of their ailments. To relieve distress must be right in general. There is much dispute as to magnetism, but Col. Olcott seems to be of opinion that its cures are effected by actual virtue in magnetic fluid, and not by "control" of any patient. But in many of his cures there was a lack of permanence, due probably to lack of continuance of treatment, as he was constantly on the move. Questions of this sort ought to refer to some fact or publication in support of the assumption put in the question, as otherwise it is not possible to answer intelligently or adequately.

QUESTION CXXXIII.

The soul, we are taught, passes after death through Kama Loca into Devachan. Does it not follow, therefore, that in returning from Devachan it must again pass through Kama Loca before emerging once more on this material plane? If this is so, what are the conditions and what is the length of time of this state?

Ans.—This does not follow at all. It would not follow even if Devachan was a place, unless, indeed, it was a *cul de sac* and therefore with but one mode of egress. A man may go from New York to Boston via Fall River, yet he may return by land and without stopping anywhere at all. In fact, there would be no use in his stopping if the purpose of his stay had been wholly accomplished and there was no object in a return. In Kama Loca the astral body is left, as well as the fourth principle and the lower part of the fifth. Only the enduring part of the individuality, the Ego, passes on to Devachan. What possible purpose could be served by its sojourn again, perhaps after 1000 years, in a region wherein its perishable principles had long before dissolved, and in which were merely recent shells and the disintegrating principles which had informed them?

But, in truth, Devachan is a state, not a place, and all conception of it as related to places is misleading.

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